

20th Medical Group Public Health Handshake Avoidance and Handwashing



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ABCnews.com

As Air Force members we are occasionally involved in events that expose us to other people's germs. Think of the last time you attended a promotion ceremony. How many hands did you shake? Afterwards, did you wash or sanitize your hands immediately? If you didn't, then you put yourself at risk of catching the flu. If you shook a hand that had flu virus on it and you went to the finger food buffet without washing your hands first, you would have passed those germs onto the tongs that you touched at the buffet. Then you touch your buffalo wing and eat it, "Presto", you have now ingested a virus. If you have the flu virus on hands and rub your nose, eyes or mouth you could get the flu this way as well.

Unclean hands transmit the flu and many other illnesses, so if you can avoid shaking hands it would reduce your risk of getting sick. Try these instead:

- Verbal greeting
- Fist pump in the air
- Elbow bump
- Air high five

"Make sure you wash your hands!" the phrase was instilled into all of us at an early age, whether it was by our parents or teachers. So why is it that in the U.S. an estimated 25–50 million cases of the flu are reported each year — leading to 150,000 hospitalizations and 30,000–40,000 deaths yearly? One reason is because we are not washing our hands!

There are many reasons why people feel that they can forgo this time honored advice. Some people feel that they don't have enough time to wash their hands. Some people are washing their hands but do not wash them long enough. The recommended minimum time for hand washing is 20 seconds. Just follow these simple instructions:

- Wet your hands with warm water and work up lather with soap
- Rub vigorously on your palms, backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, and under your finger nails
- Rinse with warm running water

Once you have rinsed your hands, dry them with a paper towel and use the paper towel to turn off the faucet. Remember you don't want to touch the dirty faucet with your clean hands. You can also use a paper towel to open the door as you exit the restroom. Flu and cold germs can live on inanimate objects like doorknobs and faucets. Proper hand washing is easy and very effective. We all have 20 seconds to spare for flu prevention don't we?

It's a good idea to carry alcohol based hand sanitizer with you, since there will be times when you don't have immediate access to a hand washing station. Please remember that alcohol based hand sanitizer is very effective at killing the germs but it does not remove them or the dirt from your hands. Hand washing removes germs and dirt.

There some things that you can do to prevent yourself and others from becoming sick.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after use it.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve instead of your bare hands
- Wash your hands often, especially after your cough or sneeze
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer when you can't wash your hands right away
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, germs spread that way
- Stay at home if you get sick and limit your contact with others to keep from spreading the illness

Incorrect



www.rit.edu/~andpph/photofile-c/sneeze-k-17.jpg

Correct



askdrc.missouri.edu

So go ahead and make your parents and teachers proud and "Make sure you wash your hands!" If you have any questions about hand washing, handshaking alternatives or the Influenza virus, contact Public Health at 895-6193.